

## **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

### **STAFF NOTE**

#### **Action/Discussion Item:**

Assessment design issues and the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS)  
Request for Proposals (RFP)

#### **Applicable Statute or Regulation:**

KRS 158.645 - 158.6472

#### **Action Question:**

Should the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) approve staff's recommendations regarding specific assessment design issues that will provide parameters for drafting of the CATS RFP?

#### **History/Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** Pursuant to KRS 158.6453, the Commonwealth is required to have a statewide assessment and accountability program. The current contractual arrangements for administering the assessment program expire on June 30, 2006, except those required to complete the scoring and reporting of the spring 2006 assessment that will continue through September 30, 2006. To assure continued implementation of the assessment and accountability system, a request for proposals (RFP) must be developed by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), reviewed by the Kentucky Board of Education and issued by the Division of Purchases in the Finance and Administration Cabinet that specifies the requirements for the statewide assessment. According to current procurement requirements, any such proposals must be for a two-year duration with allowance for an additional two-year extension. KDE has identified July 1, 2005, as the target date for release of the RFP. Evaluation of bids would occur from July 2005 – January 2006. Notification of the successful bidder is anticipated to be in January 2006, allowing the bidder a six-month window to work with KDE and the current vendor to assure a smooth transition prior to assuming full responsibility on July 1, 2006, the effective date of the new contract.

***Background.*** The current RFP for assessment was issued in 1998. At that time, the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* did not exist, widespread statewide testing across the country had not yet been implemented, technological advances in testing that are currently available were not yet accessible, and many of the lessons learned from implementation of the CATS assessment over time had not yet been discovered. As staff began development of the new RFP, it became clear that a new environment exists and new pressures on the assessment system require consideration of different measures to be responsive to the broader needs of the field and to assure that our students are well-positioned to compete in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

**Considerations for the Design.** In designing the elements of the new assessment system, staff used the values and priorities below as guiding principles for the process that were gleaned from various discussions over time with the KBE.

### **Values and Priorities for Kentucky's Assessment System**

- Maintain a valid and reliable testing and accountability program
- Have tests in at least reading and math annually in grades 3-8, and once in high school (grades 10-12), and at least science once per grade span (3-5, 6-8, 9-12), per federal NCLB requirements
- Develop framework for having reading and math on a longitudinal scale (i.e., vertically equated – perhaps within the school level)
- Have tests that maintain strong support for instruction
  - Must be aligned with content standards
    - Willing to accept more focused representation (e.g., sampling across two years)
  - Keep high use of constructed response, higher-order items
  - Release on a frequent basis some common items for informing instruction and interpreting standards
  - Demonstrate high interest in incremental judgments at the high school level
- Stay within the current budgeted amount provided by the legislature
- Make student score reporting more transparent through the inclusion of common items that can be released to provide more information to parents, teachers and students
- Maintain high involvement of Kentucky teachers
  - Keep involved in test development and review
  - Expand understanding of process and results (e.g., consider involving educators in local scoring and reporting; encourage use of data for local student accountability)
- Reduce time for schools, students and parents to receive scores and reports
  - Desire option for local use in student accountability (e.g., grades)
  - Interested in moving toward on-line administration and possibly in-state scoring (operational assessment for students with disabilities; on-line pilot of regular assessment in Spring '05)
- Cause no increase in total testing time
  - Balance with content representation and cost
  - Consider fall field test for writing prompt
  - Consider different administration time for the norm-referenced test (NRT) (if not embedded)
- Keep program highly credible with educators, the public, the legislature, and others

***Elements.*** Within this broad context, elements of the proposed CATS accountability system would include:

- a revised, refined set of core content standards;
- a revised writing assessment (including an on-demand writing and a writing portfolio component) scored using an analytic scoring process, and including a multiple-choice based language/mechanics assessment;
- an overall test design that will allow for the release of a number of assessment items to serve as a student accountability measure;
- a norm-referenced test;
- consideration of a possible alternate means of assessing Practical Living, Vocational Studies and Arts and Humanities;
- a longitudinal measure; and,
- an assessment measuring student readiness for postsecondary education, supported by counseling and instructional modifications.

A review of these elements in light of the specifications necessary for inclusion in a CATS RFP led staff to the development of the attached chart (Attachment A) outlining the elements of the assessment and issues in assessment design for which input from the Board is necessary in order to move forward. The design elements of the assessment, how they are handled in the current assessment, staff recommendations regarding how they might be handled in the new RFP, and guidance, where applicable, from the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability (NTAPAA) from their meeting on March 10 – 11, 2005, are included in Attachment A.

Upon receipt of guidance from the Board on the recommendations outlined in Attachment A, staff will take the necessary steps to assure inclusion of the Board's direction into the draft RFP. Staff will seek responses to the draft RFP from key advisory and policy groups prior to the June meeting. Staff will be presenting the draft RFP for approval in June and will request any additional guidance needed from the Board at that time. This timeline will assure completion of the RFP by the anticipated July 1 release date.

#### **Staff Recommendation and Rationale:**

KDE staff recommends that the Board approve the recommendations found in Attachment A regarding the design of the CATS RFP. These recommendations will result in staff being able to finalize the RFP and bring it forward for approval to the June KBE meeting.

#### **Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

All Kentucky schools aim for the same ultimate goal: proficiency for all students. The state assessment and accountability system is a means to determine what a school and district can do to: (1) improve student achievement, and (2) ensure each student progresses toward meeting student capacities and school goals as defined in Kentucky regulations and initiatives of the Kentucky Board of Education. The design of future assessments is critical to reaching the goal of proficiency.

### **Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:**

Summary input from NTAPAA at their March 10 – 11 meeting is included as Attachments B and C and is also embedded in Attachment A. Attachment B summarizes the comments on the Test Design and Attachment C summarizes the comments on the writing assessment. The NTAPAA responses have been circulated to all NTAPAA members by its chair and approved by that group via email. Consultations with additional stakeholder groups including the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council and the Local Superintendents Advisory Council are planned. This additional feedback will be reported to the Board at the April meeting.

### **Contact Person(s):**

Linda France, Deputy Commissioner  
Bureau of Learning and Results Services  
502-564-5130  
[lfrance@kde.state.ky.us](mailto:lfrance@kde.state.ky.us)

Roger Ervin, Senior Systems Analyst  
Office of Assessment and Accountability  
502-564-2256  
[rervin@kde.state.ky.us](mailto:rervin@kde.state.ky.us)

Dr. Bill Insko, Director  
Office of Assessment and Accountability  
502-564-2256  
[binsko@kde.state.ky.us](mailto:binsko@kde.state.ky.us)

Rhonda Sims, Branch Manager  
Office of Assessment and Accountability  
502-564-4394  
[rsims@kde.state.ky.us](mailto:rsims@kde.state.ky.us)

Kevin Hill, Branch Manager  
Office of Assessment and Accountability  
502-564-2256  
[khill@kde.state.ky.us](mailto:khill@kde.state.ky.us)

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**Deputy Commissioner**

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**Commissioner of Education**

### **Date:**

April 2005